

No 8

Of the Imitation of Christ.

A
SERMON

Preach'd before the

QUEEN,

A T

BATH.

Aug. 29th 1703.

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Gloucester, and Rector of *Blaby* in *Leicestershire*.

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I John ii. 6.

He that sayeth he abideth in Him, ought Himself also so to Walk, even as He Walk'd.

IN the two foregoing Verses, we find the Apostle taking great care to inform us rightly wherein the saving Knowledge and True Love of Christ do consist, namely in the Keeping of his Commandments; and to prevent all Mistakes in Duties so important and so necessary, peremptorily declaring all other pretences to Divine Love of Faith, except Obedience only, to be false and vain. *He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His Commandments, is a Lyar,* ^{1 St. John 11. 4, 5.} *and the Truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his Word, in Him verily is the Love of God perfected.* That is, let Our pretences to Faith be never so high, and Our Expressions of Love to God and Christ never so Tender and Affectionate, never so full of Warmth, and Zeal, and Rapture, yet without a ready and cheerful Compliance with the whole reveal'd Will of God, a Dutiful and Conscientious Observance of all His Holy Laws, they are nothing else but Imposture and Deceit, and Damnable Hypocrisy. He proceeds, in the words of the Text, farther to shew, that the Intimate Union with Christ, that some in His

time made their boast of, and which has in all succeeding Ages, and particularly Our Own, been pretended to, if unaccompany'd with True Holiness, such a Sanctity of Life as Christ himself, with whom they would be thought so Intimate, was the great Pattern of, is highly Presumptuous and Vain also. That the Man that talks never so much of getting Christ, of *Leaning upon Christ, and Rolling upon Christ*, of *being in Christ*, (*abiding in Him*, as it is here express'd,) without Imitating Christ, with all his Resting, and Recumbency, and Indwelling, or whatever other Fanciful, Affected, Enthusiastick Strains he may please himself with, or impose upon Others by, is a *Liar* too, and *the Truth is not in Him*. But, *He that saith He abideth in Him*, to make good what he says, ought *Himself also so to Walk, even as he Walked*. So that in short, We have this as the Determination of Him, who was *The Belov'd Disciple*; that to love Jesus is to Obey His Commands; of Him, that was admitted into Jesus's Bosom; that to *abide in Him* is to follow His Example. Having just before shewn, that the highest Affection that We can express to Him, is to *Keep His Words*, He immediately teaches, that the closest Union We can have with Him is to imitate His Deeds. And indeed this will come to the same thing. For our Blessed Master's Words were express'd in His Deeds.

Jo. vii. 46. He did not only speak so as never any Man spake, but

but liv'd so as never any Man liv'd. This it was that made him *Teach as one having Authority*, Mat. vii. 29. and not as the Scribes. Whom tho' He Com-
manded his Hearers to Obey in what they Taught, yet he warn'd 'em not to imitate in what they Practis'd, because *they said but did not*. Matt. xxiii. 3. Whereas on the contrary He was as Powerful a Preacher of Righteousness in every Action of his most Holy Life, as in his most divine Sermon upon the Mount. For if we take the most short and transient view of the Eight Beautitudes in That Heavenly Discourse, shall we not find every one of them in a most Eminent degree to belong to the divine Person that pronounc'd them? shall not we at first glance perceive every Grace that he recommends to his Followers, by his Lively Word, most conspicuously set forth by Himself in his Living Example? Do's He tell Us, *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit*? Who then Matt. v. 3. ever had a juster Title to Blessedness than He, *Who being in the form of God, thought it no Robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no Reputation, and took upon Him the form of a Servant, and was made in the likeness of Men, and being found in fashion as a Man he humbled Himself and became Obedient unto Death, even the Death of the Cross?* Phil. ii. 6, 7. Are they *Blessed that Mourn*? Who then ever de- Matt. v. 4. serv'd Blessing in a Higher degree than He? whose whole Life made good the Character by which he was so Remarkably distinguish'd and foretold

foretold by the Evangelical Prophet; *A Man of*
 If. Liii. 3. *Sorrow and acquainted with Grief? Is Blessedness*
 Matt. v. 5. *pronounc'd to the Meek? And was ever Meekness*
like His, who was Oppress'd and Afflicted, yet He o-
 If. Liii. 7. *pen'd not his Mouth, who was brought as a Lamb to*
 Matt. xi. 29. *the Slaughter, and as a Sheep before her Shearer is*
Dumb, so he open'd not his Mouth: Who Com-
 Matt. v. 6. *manded us for the sake of this particular Grace*
 Jo. iv. 34. *to learn of Him, Learn of me for I am Meek. Are*
 Matt. v. 7. *They Blessed, That hunger and thirst after Righteous-*
ness? How Blessed then was He, whose Meat it
 Matt. v. 7. *was to do the Will of Him that sent him, and to finish*
 his Work? Do's it follow, *Blessed are the Merciful?*
 Blessed then certainly above all Others was the
 most Compassionate Jesus, whose whole Life was
 made up of Instances of Commiseration, and
 Pity. But his Death more especially, wherein
 He so above measure approv'd Himself, what
 Heb. xi. 7. he is Stil'd by the Apostle, *A Merciful High Priest!*
 So Merciful, that rather than We should perish,
 he was content not only to be the Priest, but
 the Sacrifice too! Did He say, *Blessed are the*
 Matt. v. 8. *Pure in Heart? And was ever any Innocence or*
 Purity like His? A Purity that could bear the
 Job. xv. 15. *severest Test of Gods own Eyes, in whose sight*
even the Heavens themselves are not Clean. But
 Heb. xi. 14. *He was Pure even as God is Pure, and through*
 the Eternal Spirit offered Himself without Spot to
 Matt. v. 9. *God. Did He Teach us, Blessed are the Peace-*
makers? Then certainly Blessed above all that
 were

were ever blest, was the Only Reconciler between Heaven and Earth, the great Peace-maker between God and Man, *The Prince of Peace*. Lastly, is there a Blessing pronounc'd to them, ^{11. ix. 6.} that are persecuted for Righteousness sake? This ^{Matt. v. 10.} Blessing certainly in its highest Degree must be allow'd to belong to Him, whose whole Life and Death, from the sordid Manger to the Bloody Cross, were taken up in Suffering all Evil, and doing all Good, in being Unrighteously persecuted for *Fulfilling all Righteousness*, ^{Rev. v. 12.} *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive Power, and Riches, and Wisdom, and Strength, and Honour, and Glory, and Blessing.*

Thus we see that our Blessed Saviour, Worthy above all to be so call'd, did not only Instruct us by His Doctrine, but lead us by His Example, did not only point out to us the Way wherein we should walk, but trod it before us. He enjoins us no Hardships but what He Himself underwent, engages us in no Difficulties but what He Himself chose to encounter, and in His Own Person shew'd us both *That* they were, and *How* they were to be Overcome, It is recorded to the great Honour of *Cæsar*, that His Word of Command to his Soldiers was never *Ite*, but *Venite*, not March, but Follow. Much more Heroical, or rather Divine, because in a much more difficult, as well as Glorious Warfare, is the Voice of our great Leader,
Take

Mark viii.

34.

Heb. ii.

10.

Jo. xvi.

33.

Take up your Cross and follow me. Lest any of His Soldiers should Fear or Faint, *the Captain of our Salvation* would Himself be first *made perfect through Sufferings*, and to every one that has listed himself to fight under his Banners, if they shrink or fall back, His Bloody Conflict with Sin and Death cries aloud, *Ignave Venire Te Christus non Ire jubet*, and He Himself animates and enlivens them with His Own Victory; *Be of good Cheer, for I have overcome the World.* What greater Encouragement than This can there be to follow His Steps? and what greater Reward for so doing can We, on this side Heaven, desire than This Assurance, that as long as *We walk as He walked we abide in Him?* are so United to Him as Living Members of His Mystical Body, as to be capable of receiving the Influences of Grace here, and Participation of Glory hereafter, from Him Our Head.

I. I shall therefore, First briefly propose to you this perfect Pattern of all Holiness.

II. Secondly excite you by the most prevailing Arguments I can think of, to endeavour studiously to Copy it out in your Lives and Conversations.

I. First then, give me leave to lay before you the great and perfect Pattern of all Holiness in the Life of our Blessed Lord.

It was a bright Imagination of one of the Divinest Writers among the Heathens, That if

Virtue

Virtue could put on a Humane Shape, and present it self Visible to Mortal Eyes, the perfect Beauty of it would ravish all Beholders, would every way diffuse incredible Delight, and kindle inextinguishable Love. This supposition, that was but a flight of Fancy in the Philosopher, was in some Sense really made good in Our Blessed Saviour, *God manifest in the Flesh*. For when *the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us, and Men beheld his Glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of Grace and Truth;* Jo. i. 14. Then did all Vertue, and Sanctity, and Goodness most conspicuously shine forth and present themselves as it were, to Humane View, Visible and Alive in His Divine Person. His was the Holiest Life that ever was led upon Earth, as Holy as could be desir'd, even by God Himself, for it was the Exact and Adæquate performance of His whole Will, the strict Observances of every one of His Laws, the *Fulfilling of Righteousness*. A Life able to teach us the Highest Perfections of Sanctity, but in Instances agreeable to Our Reason, and suitable to Our Strength, Easy, and Natural, and Familiar. A Life made up of Excellencies so Divine, and Condescensions so Humane, as at once Excite our Wonder, and Enforce our Love, and Invite our Imitations.

It were endless to run through all the Particulars of it, and to shew distinctly in how great

Perfection he fulfill'd Every Duty - relating either to God, Our Neighbour, or Our Selves, I shall but briefly touch upon the Chief Heads of Each.

He was the most Exalted Pattern of Piety towards God, that ever was seen in the World, and that both in the Inward and Essential Part of it, which consists in Knowledge, and Love, and Submission, and Resignation to the Divine Will, and also in the Outward and Circumstantial Expressions of it, in the Exterieur Duties of Religion, and the Publick Worship of God; Without the least Mixture of Coldness, or Enthusiasm in the One, or Scrupulousness, or Superstition in the Other.

1 Pet. ii.
2.

1 Cor.
xiii. 12.
Jo. vi. 46.

First, As to what concerns the Inward and Essential Part of it, We know that all true Piety is founded upon Faith. Faith is the first Ray of that Divine Brightness that is kindled in Our Hearts by Him, *who has call'd Us out of Darknes into his Marvellous Light.* And if Our Blessed Saviour had not This, it was because Faith, tho' the Highest Perfection of a Christian, had been an Imperfection in Christ; who wanted not to Believe, because He *Knew* the Father. And This His Knowledge was Immediate Intuition, and Unclouded Vision, whereas the Faith of the most Enlighten'd Saint *sees but as through a Glass darkly.* No Man has seen the Father, save He which is of God, He has seen the Father. St. Paul himself even

even after he had been caught up into the third ^{2 Cor. xii. 2.} Heaven professes but to Know in Part. But our ^{1 Cor. xiii. 12.} Saviour actually possess'd here what his Apostle only aspir'd to hereafter, *To Know even as also He* ^{Ibid.} *was Known.* For thus he tells us of himself, *As* ^{Jo. x. 15.} *the Father knoweth Me even so know I the Father,* Every Grace therefore, that among Men flows from imperfect Belief; must be concluded to have been in an infinitely greater measure and higher Degree in Him, who was fill'd with Perfect Knowledge. And yet we must Observe that as Faith, properly speaking, was not in Christ, so neither could Repentance, the Other great Christian Duty be, because in Him, who had no Sin, there was no matter for it to be Exerciz'd upon: As His knowledge excluded Faith, so His Innocence left no Room for Repentance. Yet even this Virtue, tho' properly it cannot be said to have been in Him, We may Learn from Him. For tho' He had no Sins of His Own, yet for Ours He was sufficiently Griev'd, surely Contrition enough He underwent *when He was bruis'd for the Iniquities of Us all,* ^{II. Liii. 5.} when he Struggled with that bitter Agony, wherein his Body Sweat monstrous drops of Blood, and *His Soul was exceeding Sorrowful even* ^{Matt. xxvi. 38.} *unto Death.* Having taken our Transgressions upon Him. He willingly submitted to the severest Punishment of them; And to *be willing to suffer for Sin* is a very great Degree, but to *be*

able to satisfy for it is a much greater, Even the Top and Perfection of Repentance. But this also he for Us perform'd, and pay'd even to the uttermost Farthing the Immense Debt due from Our Sins to His Fathers Justice.

So that if the Two Chief Christian Duties, Faith and Repentance were not found in Christ it was because He had something Analogous to Both, but much more Excellent than Either in their Stead: Because He was much more than a Believer or a Penitent; As much more than a Believer, as Vision is more Excellent than the Evidence of Things not seen; as much more than a Penitent, as satisfaction for the Iniquities of a whole World exceeds the Sorrow for Mans own Sin.

The Love of God, in us, is the immediate and genuine Effect of Faith, and Generally proportionable to the Light of Our Belief is the Warmth of Our Affection. But the Love of God which was in Christ, as it flow'd from a much Noble Principle; so questionless it rose a much greater height, and left infinitely below it in all that was ever call'd by that Name among the Sons of Men. But yet we find nothing in it like those Transports of Passion, those Extravagant Raptures and Extacies which some Warm and Fanatical People pretend to, and would have the Love of God to consist in. We here nothing from Him like those Wild Expressions, tho

Unwarrantable, if not Impious Flights, that Mystical Writers affect and delight in, of being swallow'd up, and United by Love to the Divine Essence, and Transfus'd into God. No; The Love of God being the great Duty, to which all Mankind, as well the Simple and the Mean, as the Learned and the Great, are Equally and Indispensibly oblig'd, with what Wisdom, and Sweetness and Condescension did he Temper it for Our Sake? That it might be Imitable and Easy to all both to understand and Practise, in what a Plain and Instructive manner did he Choose to make it visible to the World? Wherein did His Love to the Father show it self, but in That, wherein He would have His Disciples Love to Himself be likewise seen, in Keeping his Commandments? *That the World* Jo. xiv. *may know that I love the Father, as the Father gave* ^{31.} *me Commandment, so I do.*

Prayer is an Excellent Expression of Faith and Love, and the Means also of procuring every other Grace, and Christ therefore Himself, tho' He had the fulness of all Grace in Him, yet as if he still wanted fresh Supplies of it, was, for Our Example, sometimes *whole Nights in* Luk. vi. *Prayer.* But the Fervor which is the Life of ^{12.} this Duty He shew'd us to consist, not, as some would have it; in Frantic Gestures, or Passionate Exclamations, not in a Flow of Words, or Vehemence of Expression, but in Elevation of Heart

Heart, and Earnestness of Desire, accompany'd with lowest Humility of Mind, and entire Resignation of Spirit. Every Prayer that hath these Ingredients is a Fervent Prayer, let the Words be never so Sedate or Few, the Behaviour never so compos'd or quiet. So much we learn both by that Absolute Form which He taught His Disciples, and by That Prayer also which Himself made use of not long before His Crucifixion. The first of these, tho' full of Admirable and Divine Sense, containing in it whatever is fit for us to ask of God, both for Our Souls and Bodies, yet is compris'd in a very few, and those very short Petitions, Breathing forth nothing but Meekness and Calmness and Submission every way suitable to the Temper of its Author. As for the Other, Tho' certainly our Lord's Affections were never more mov'd, than in that his most Doleful Agony,

Luk. xxii.
44.

tho he never pray'd *more Earnestly* than on that Occasion, yet these Few, Meek, and Gentle Words are all that so much Concern Extorted from Him ; *Father, if Thou be Willing, remove this Cup from me ; Nevertheless, not my Will, but Thine be Done*

Luk. xxii.
42.

Secondly, If we consider Our Lord's Example, in His Outward Expressions of Religion and the Ceremonial Part of God's Worship, as it was then in Use in the *Jewish Church*, we shall find nothing in his Behaviour, but Obedience and Conformity.

Tho

Tho' one great End of His coming, was to take away the Ceremonial Part of the Law of Moses, yet, as long as it was to last, how careful was He to preserve in it Decency and Order! How readily in the meantime did He comply with all Indifferent and Harmless Rites! Much more Those that were Instructive and Significant! He celebrated the Passover but an Hour before He Substituted His Holy Supper in its Place: He observ'd all the Festivals of the Church, not only those that were of Divine Appointment, but the *Feast of the Declaration* it Jo. x. 22. self, a Feast purely of Human Institution, and no Older than *Judas Maccabæus*. It was sufficient I Maccab; iv. 59. to Him that it was ordain'd by the Church, of which He was then a Member, nor did He take upon him to question Her Authority in so Innocent a Rite. And what He practis'd Himself, He expressly commanded His Disciples to Imitate. The Scribes and Pharisees, says He, sit in Moses's seat, all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do. Which, by the way, is an Inanswerable Authority for the Churches Right in Ordering Matters of Ceremony and Things Indifferent. For surely the Jewish Church was at that time Corrupt enough to be denied that Privilege, if it were ever fit that such a Privilege should be deny'd the Church. And if Christ thus Taught and Practis'd Obedience to Corrupt Church, what must be thought of Those

Matt. xxiii. 2, 3.

Those who Refuse it to a Pure one? If He submitted to all the *Jewish* Rites, so Numerous, so Dark, and so Burdensome, what can they plead in their Excuse, who disdain to comply with the Ceremonies of Our Church, so Few, so Rational, and so Decent? They must not, they cannot justly, take it ill to be told, that however they may Flatter themselves, *They do not abide in Christ, because they do not Walk as He Walk'd.*

Now was our Saviour's Obedience to the Civil Government under which He liv'd, less remarkable, or Instructive. How Careful was He to maintain the Peace of it! How ready to pay all the Duties of a Subject to it! How Innocent was He of that Lying Accusation brought against Him, of *perverting the Nation, forbidding to give Tribute to Caesar, and saying that He was Himself a King!* Quite contrary, He fled from being made a King, and hid Himself from the Multitude that would have forc'd Him to it, He Publickly determin'd, that *The Things that are Caesars should be render'd to Caesar*, as Conscientiously as *Unto God the Things that are God's*; and rather than refuse Tribute in His Own Person, He put Himself to the Expence of a Miracle to pay it.

Luke xxiii.
2.

Jo. vi. 16.

Mark xii.
17.

Matt.
xvii. 27.

And as He pay'd to God and the Powers ordain'd by Him the most Entire Obedience, so He Exercis'd over Himself the most Absolute

Com-

Command. The Regulating of Our Passions aright is the Ground of all, or most of the Duties relating to Ourselves; and Our Saviour was undoubtedly the most perfect Master of These that ever the World knew. Not the hardest Usage, nor the severest Tryals could ever discompose the Evenness of his Mind; but as He perform'd the best Works without the least Pride or Vain Glory, so He endur'd the worst Accidents, to which Human Nature is Subject without the least Murmuring or Complaint. He express'd indeed Human Affections upon several Occasions; He was seen to be Angry, and to Grieve, and to Pity, and to Weep; Else He had not been a Man, He had not truly assum'd Our Nature if He had not taken these Passions along with it. But He us'd them as Servants only to Virtue and Instruments of Piety, nor ever suffer'd them to stir but in Strictest Obedience to Reason. They were never Exercis'd but upon a Right Object, nor ever Exceeded a just Degree, so that they never caus'd any such disturbance in Him, as was contrary to Religion or Offensive to God, or Destructive of His own Peace, when he seem'd most mov'd He was in better Temper than We are at Our Prayers! All His Natural Appetites were under the same Command, and the exact Regulation of Them also made Him the most perfect Example of Chastity, Sobriety, Temperance, neglect of Worldly things, Con-

tempt of Riches and Vain applause of Men, in every thing seeking not His own but His Father's Glory.

Luk. x.
27.

As to the Duties relating to Our Neighbour, however they may be by some neglected, and even Despis'd and Villify'd as meer Heathen Virtues, yet Our Blessed Saviour laid almost as great Stress upon Them, as even on Those which we are oblig'd to pay to God Himself. All these Duties are summ'd up in that Great and Comprehensive Precept of *Loving Our Neighbour as Our Selves*. But Our Saviour Taught This in a much more lively manner by His Doing, than Speaking; nay far exceeded His Precept by His Practice. *To Love Our Neighbour as our Selves*, was the highest that He commanded Us, but He Lov'd Us much more than Himself, for He freely gave Himself for Us! To be Buffeted, and Spit upon, and Revil'd, and Murder'd, and made a Curse in Our Stead! But before that, through the whole Course of His Life, which He only prolong'd to furnish Us with the more Examples of Goodness; what was His continual Employment, but Works of Beneficence, and Mercy, and Charity! How did *He go about doing Good*! Ever engag'd in Offices becoming the Saviour of Mankind! Either delivering from the Power of the Devil, those that were possess'd with Unclean and Tormenting Spirits, or refreshing the Hungry Multitude with a Miraculous Encrease of Bread, or giving Eyes to the Blind.

Act. x.
38.

Blind, or Feet to the Lame, or Hearing to the Deaf, or Speech to the Dumb, or Sinews to the Paralytick, or Life to the Dead! And if we consider not only the Works themselves that He did, but the manner in which He did them; how free from Ostentation or Vanity, with how much Condescention, and Affability, and Meekness, and Patience, and Perseverance, if we are not more obstinate than the *Jews* themselves, we must needs cry out as they were forc'd to do, *He has done all Things well!* We must needs confess, that His was a Life made up of all the Vertues and Graces, that were ever scatter'd abroad severally and thinly among the best of Men, or that ever were requir'd even by God Himself. A Life of Nicest Justice, and Strictest Temperance, and Angelical Chastity, of Profoundest Humility, and Invincible Patience, of Highest Devotion and most Enlarg'd Beneficence, burning ever with Zeal towards God, and Charity towards Men!

This is a short, and that too but a very faint and imperfect Draught of the great Pattern set Us by Our Lord, which tho' capable of it self, by the bare proposal of it, to enflame Us with a desire of Imitation, yet to assist You in it, and to raise the more Your desires, and Encourage Your Endeavour to transcribe so divine a Copy, I shall now proceed.

II. In the Second Place, to offer such Arguments as the Time and Your Patience will ad-

And here we may observe, *First*, That Examples, in general, even of Men like Our Selves have, with great Reason, ever been accounted more forcible than Commands to stir us up to all great and generous Undertakings. They come nearer to Us, fall more directly upon Our Senses, and being Particular Facts are much more powerful to Excite Us than General Notions can possibly be. The force of Example Overcomes our Fears, and makes things Easy and Familiar, by being reduc'd into Practice, which in the Precept, and at first hearing seem'd Difficult and Terrible. Nor does it remove Our Fears only but our Pretences and Excuses too, the most Usual and the most Fatal of which is the Impossibility of Our Duty, We first pronounce the Command grievous and impracticable, and then absolve Our Selves from Obeying it. But God has abundantly provided against this sloathful Objection, by raising up in every Age of his Church so many Heroick Patterns of Faith and Obedience. There is no part of Our Duty but has been so exactly perform'd by some or other of His Saints, that there is no Room left for despair but that, by the same Assistance of Grace, which was afforded Them, and which God is ready upon our Prayers to vouchsafe to Us, We also may be able to perform the like. Even these therefore, in their Way, and in their Measure, are great Furtherances and Encouragements to Us in Running the same Race,

which They have so successfully and gloriously Run before Us. But what are all these less Examples, and of some particular Virtues only, to That of Our great Master, in whom all the several Excellencies, which singly adorn'd others, are united, without the least Stain of Sin, or Mixture of Vice, or Shadow of Imperfection? Christ is the Only Person that ever perform'd the Whole Law, and therefore is the Only perfect Pattern, in which there is nothing Deficient, He is the only Person that never committed the least Sin, and therefore the only Safe Pattern in which there is nothing Dangerous to imitate. The Lives and Actions of all other Men are Subject to Error, and the most perfect among the Saints have had their Falls. David we are told was a *Man after Gods own Heart*, yet ^{Acts xiii. 22.} should we follow David in all he did he would lead us into the two dreadful Sins of Adultery and Murder. And as great an Apostle as Peter was, should we in every thing make Him Our Example, We should not only Follow Christ but deny Him too. So that if We should be desirous of imitating even the best of all the Saints, we cannot safely do so without that Restriction of St. Paul, *Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ.* ^{1 Cor. xi. 1.} So far, and no farther, the Holiest of Men are to be imitated, as They have imitated the Holy Jesus. Let this therefore serve for One Argument for Our *Walking as He Walk'd*, because We shall be Ever then, and on-

ly then sure of being in the Right, while We
 Jo. xiv. 6. follow Him who is *The Way, and The Truth.*

Secondly, The Honour of being like Christ ought to be no weak Incitement to Our Imitation of Him. For what can be so high an Exaltation of our Nature, as a Similitude of the Divine Perfections? And Our Saviour in His Most Holy Life, has shewn Us the Only Sure way of attaining so Glorious a Resemblance, the Only Safe way of gratifying so High an Ambition. For it is dangerous to affect in all things a Likeness with God. The aspiring to be like to God in Power was the Loss of Heaven to Lucifer, and the Ambition of being like to God in Knowledge, was the Loss of Paradise to Man. But our Desires to be like to God in Holiness can never be Excessive or Criminal. This Likeness is that Original Image of God, in which we were first Created, which has long ago been quite worn out, or foully defac'd by Sin; but to which, by being made like to Christ, we are again restor'd, and are *Created anew in the Image of God, in Righteousness and True Holiness.*

Ephes. iv.
24.

Thirdly, And for this very end did God from all Eternity ordain, that Christ should be made like unto Us, that He might Teach Us to be like to Him; and Us also, as many as are His, *He did predestinate to be Conform'd to the Image of His Son.* Our Lord Jesus Christ for This Purpose put on Our Flesh, that We might, as St. Paul advises, *Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.* This

Rom. viii.
29.

Rom. xiii.
14.

therefore ought to be a farther Argument to us, why we should most studiously endeavour to follow His Blessed Example, that we may not seem to despise the gracious Design, and frustrate, as much as in us lies, the great End for which He dwelt among us, and Familiarly convers'd with Us. He, who upon the account of the infinite Dignity of His Person, could have expiated for the Sins of the whole World, only by Dying for them, chose also, by Living, to teach Us to reform them, and purposely continu'd so long with Us, that practising all kinds of Virtues, he might in every Case be our Leader, and Example. That He might convince Us also how Equitably God had dealt with Us, in prescribing such a Law, as commanded nothing but what God Himself, when He was made Man, thought it became Him to Do. Is not the perfect Obedience which Christ, in Our Nature, paid to this Law, a full Demonstration how *Reasonable* a Service God requires at Our Hands, while He Exacts from Us no other Duties, but what are so Excellent in Themselves, that the *Son of God* was Willing, and so Possible to Us, that the *Son of Man* was able to perform them?

Fourthly, Which leads to a fourth Argument to Encourage us in the Imitation of Our Blessed Lord, and that is the Easiness of the Example. For tho' our Saviours Life was in every thing Great, and Holy and Divine, yet was it Sweet and Affable, and Complying with Human Conversation ;

Conversation ; Familiar and Natural, Free from all Pharisaical Sourness and Pride, or Puritanical Niceness and Superstition, not affecting the Solitude of the Desert, or the Severity of the Cloyster. Tho' He had his Time of Retirement in the Wilderness, yet He Liv'd not there, *He Taught daily in the Temple*, He convers'd freely in the City, He was present at Public Entertainments. *He came Eating and Drinking*, and that with all sorts of Persons, He despis'd no Mans Table, but often sat down even with Publicans and Sinners. His was a Life, not of Ecstasies and Abstractions and Irrational Austerities, like that of the Legendary Saints, but consisting as of Excellencies Worthy, so of Compliances Possible to be imitated. The Purity and Innocence, the Humility and Patience, the Meekness and Gentleness, the Sweetness and Candor that adorn'd His Conversation, His Incessant and daily Labour in promoting the Glory of God and the Welfare of Men; which was the Even and Ordinary, and Steady and Constant Course of His Holy Life, is the proper Object of Our Imitation. And this the very Phrase made use of in the Text implies, *To Walk as He Walk'd*, signifying to follow Him in His Ordinary and most Usual Works, in the Customary and Habitual Employments of His Life, to Copy those Actions that were the Kind and Familiar Instances of his Humanity and Goodness, not Those that were the Glorious and Amazing Proofs of His Divinity and Power. To

Mat. xi.
19.

Walk

Walk as He Walked, not when He walked upon the Sea, but when *He went about Doing Good*. For we cannot but observe, that there are many Actions of His, which as they are above the Strength of Our Nature to perform, so it would be a wild and Impious Presumption in Us to attempt. Such as were all His Miracles, wrought for the Confirmation of our Faith, not for Patterns of our Obedience. And

The two greatest Instances of His more than Human Excellency, were for this reason transacted in Private : His Transfiguration was on a *High Mountain apart*, Mat. xvii. 1. before Three only of His Disciples, to whom He strictly enjoyn'd Secrecy, and charg'd them to *tell no Man of the Glorious Vision*. And when he Fasted v. 9. Forty Days, and baffled the Tempter, and was Minister'd to by Angels, he chose to be alone in the unfrequented Wilderness. These His Greatnesses He Studiously conceal'd ; but His Goodness He every where, and upon all Occasions, as industriously display'd. An Evident Token, that in all His Actions His main Design was, not so much to be Admir'd as Lov'd ; not so much to appear Glorious and Wonderful, as Gracious and Imitable to Mankind.

Fifthly, and lastly, by the strongest Ties of Gratitude we are bound to imitate That Life of His, which did not only instruct Us in Holiness, but merited Happiness for Us too. For as His Passive Obedience unto Death redeem'd Us from Death, so the Active Obedience of His Life purchas'd for Us Immortality. If then we consider, that all the good Works which Our Saviour wrought, were not only for our Example, to *shew Us*, *how we should*

We be fir'd with desire of Imitation! Any great Patterns of Mercy, and Kindness, and Generosity, may Teach Us; but those that are Exercis'd upon Our Selves Provoke us too, and not only Enlighten our Understandings to Know and Approve, but Enflame our Wills to Love and Emulate. When We do but Read of the Virtues of Men, such especially as have been the High Examples of Magnanimity and Patience, and Mercy, and Largeness of Mind and Universal Charity, we cannot help entertaining a secret Value and Inward Esteem for their Characters, tho' We Ourselfes share nothing of their Goodness, or were ever at all blest with their Bounty. But now all these Excellencies, as they shine forth in their fullest Lustre in our Blessed Redeemer, so they have the nearest Relation, and are of Infinite Concern and Unexpressible Advantage to Us. Every Action of His Life (for His Life it self) was undertaken for Us; Every Good Work of His (and Every Work of His was Good) was perform'd for Our sake: In order to Fulfil all Righteousness, to make up our Deficiencies, to Perfect That Obedience which was indispensibly due from Us to the Divine Law, but which not One, not all the Sons of Adam were able to pay. And can the Consideration of This choose but raise in Us a most Amiable and Venerable Idea of His Person? Can We choose but Love and Revere a Goodness so Great, and of which We Our selves so plentifully partake? And, if We truly Love, what can That produce in Us better, nay, what is a more Genuine and Natural Effect of Love, than a Desire of likeness, a Study of Imitation, an Aspiring to a Conformity with that Excellence with which we are Enamour'd?

What can we do less than all the rest of the world?

to comply with his Merciful Design, who became Miserable and Vile, being made like Us, that We might be made Happy and Glorious by being made like Him?

Can We do otherwise than Hate and Avoid all Sin, which was the only thing in which he would have no likeness with Us, tho' all the rest of our Infirmities He most willingly took upon Him to deliver Us from it? Was in all things else made like to Us, that He might be capable of Suffering the most bitter Pains, to free Us from the Guilt, and Dominion, and Punishment of it?

Can We do otherwise than Love and Pursue all Holiness for His sake, who for Our sake led so Holy a Life among Us, as was not only Instructive enough to Teach us to Live like Him here, but of Virtue enough to Merit for Us to Reign with him for Ever hereafter?

Can We think any thing too much to do for His sake, who in every one of His Offices has done so much for Us? Who as Prophet, by his Doctrine and Example taught us the way to Everlasting Happiness; who as Priest, by His Perfect Oblation of Himself, Merited and Obtained it for Us; and as King by his Power actually confers it on all those (but only those) who Obey the Laws and Imitate the Life of their Sovereign?

Let us then have continual Regard to His most Holy Life, and labour Faithfully to express it in our own, while we have constantly His doings before our Eyes, and sincerely strive to adjust Our own by them, tho' We shall be sure, with all our Endeavours to fall infinitely short of our great Pattern, yet we shall

His to Overflow and supply all the Defects of our Obedience, and may act with this comfortable assurance, that whatever is but Endeavour'd Heartily to be done after His Example, shall partake of His Merits, and the Imperfect Copy shall be valu'd and accepted for the Infinite Worth of the Original.

Let us therefore earnestly strive to resemble Him in all his imitable Perfections; Let us set before Us all the Virtues which He vouchsafed to Exercise among Us, as Constant Directions and Exact Rules to Model and Fashion all our Actions by, and how sensible soever of our Human Frailty we may be, yet, if the
 Phil. ii. *same Mind be in Us which was also in Christ Jesus,*
 5. let us not doubt but He, who sees the Willingness of our Spirit, will assist the Weakness of our Flesh, and Enable us by His Grace to accomplish, what he has Taught us by His Example to Undertake.

Heb. xii. Let us *Look ever unto Jesus not the Author only*
 2. *but the Finisher of Our Faith,* Steering our Course by the Light, and receiving Courage from the Influence of His Example, till we arrive at the Heaven
 Ps. cvii. *where we would be;* Till being first made like to
 30. Him in Holiness, we be finally made like to Him in Glory, and from treading in his Steps below, we be advanc'd to the Honour of filling up his
 Revel. xiv. 4. *Train above, and follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes.*

To Whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit be rendered and ascrib'd, as is most due, all Praise, Might, Majesty and Dominion both now and for evermore. Amen.